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of inhaling the bacilli of consumption, there are others who would be running some risk. With this knowledge in our possession and the means in our power of reducing the danger to a minimum, it is plainly the duty of everybody to assist in making these suggestions operative. When this is done, there can be no doubt that the number of consumptive cases will be very materially lessened.

WALTER F. CHAPPELL, M. D.

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#### HENRY CLAY ON NATIONALIZING THE TELEGRAPH.

THE correspondence, note-books, and private papers of Alfred Vail have lately been deposited in the National Museum at Washington. Mr. Vail was the inventor, in connection with Professor S. F. B. Morse, of the electric telegraph, and it was his mechanical knowledge and inventive genius that gave practical shape to Professor Morse's ideas. Vail was associated with Morse as his partner, and his money constructed the first available Morse instrument and brought about its exhibition before Congress.

These Vail papers show that Vail was a partner of Morse in inventive brain and push, as well as in money. They exhibit hundreds of his own drawings designed for the improvement of the telegraph, and his note-books sparkle with suggestions. It was he who exhibited the machine before Congress in connection with Morse in 1838, and it was he who received the first message over the wires after they were built from Washington to Baltimore. In his papers may be read the whole history of the origin of the telegraph, and the correspondence includes many letters from noted men as to its use and its probable effect upon business and the country. Some of these deal with the question of the government control of the telegraph and show that the sentiments both of the inventors and of the greater statesmen of the time were in favor of the United States Government owning and operating the new invention. This opinion was generally expressed at the time the telegraph was first shown to the Congressional Committee on Commerce in the Capitol at Washington. Mr. Vail's letter describing this exhibition has never been published. It is written to his father and is as follows:

“WASHINGTON, D. C., CAPITOL, ROOM COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, }  
February 13, 1838. }

“MESSRS. S. VAIL & SON :

“The Committee on Commerce have just witnessed the operation of the machine with entire satisfaction, and the effect which it produced, I think, is the forerunner of success in our object. They have just left the room after giving Professor M. instructions how to proceed, and they speak of it as a serious thing whether the government take it under their control, or corporations. Mr. Smith, the chairman, said it would do immense mischief if it were not under the government. They advised Professor M. to invite all of the members of Congress and heads of departments to witness the operation of the machine prior to introducing the subject before the House. This course will be taken by us. I have prevailed upon Professor M. to use the dictionary which he has done with complete success. But had he used the alphabet, it would have been a different story. I could not induce him to give up the alphabet until the last hour, so reluctant was he. The proposition will be to try a circuit from Philadelphia to New York. The members of the committee think that would be best, and Professor M. is to give his proposals written. From all I can now see I fear I will not be able to leave this week—perhaps not the next. I am looking every day for a letter from you with means. I have only about ten dollars, half of which is specie and which I do not wish to part with. The House was in an uproar all day yesterday upon a resolution which Mr. Wise offered on

account of a letter in the *C. and En.* of New York, charging one of the members with taking compensation for pulling the strings with the government. It is now generally understood to be a member of the Senate from Maine. I will write again as soon as there is anything happens which will interest you. Now you must act and now you must enable me to act. If it is necessary for me to stay two weeks, I must stay, although I would rather return as soon as possible. Give my love to Mother, Mary, Sarah, Dr., and the children. I remain,

"Yours affectionately,      "ALFRED VAIL."

Six years after this letter was written a telegraph line between Washington and Baltimore had been completed. It worked well, surprising every one in Washington by announcing Henry Clay as nominated for the Presidency by the Whig convention in Baltimore, hours before the news arrived in the ordinary way, and on May 24, in the chamber of the United States Supreme Court, the famous first public despatch, "What hath God wrought," was penned by Miss Annie Ellsworth, the daughter of the then Commissioner of Patents, and was sent over the wires to Baltimore, where Mr. Vail received it.

At this time the inventors still hoped that the government would purchase and assume the control of the telegraph, but no movement was made by Congress to that effect. A few months later the owners of the invention received an offer of \$200,000 for it, and the acceptance of this offer was conditional on the consent of Alfred Vail. When Vail received notice of this fact in August, 1844, he wrote a letter to Henry Clay telling him of this offer and asking his advice. After stating that he believed that the general government should have the refusal of the telegraph, he says that the whole question of the sale has been left with him and he is at a loss what to do. He then goes on as follows:

"Having been personally and daily engaged in experimenting, and my mind with every day's experience expanding with the progress and the development of the telegraph, I have taken a broader view of the subject and its results than mere dollars and cents, and the more I reflect upon it the more I am led to believe that the electro-magnetic telegraph is destined to have and to exert a greater amount of moral influence upon the community, if under proper guidance, than any discovery in this or any other past age of the world. If, on the other hand, it should be controlled by vicious and designing men, possessed, so to speak, of the attribute, or, rather, of the faculty of ubiquity, what amount of evil may they not inflict upon that same community in a political, moral, and in fact in every point of view that can be conceived of! The questions upon which I ask advice are: Whether or not the government should have the refusal; and the probability of the government's taking it. I do not pretend to more patriotism than my neighbors, and I believe I look to my own interests closely, as every man should do, and I profess to have an innate and abiding sense of duty and care for the prosperity of my country and the perpetuity of the liberties we enjoy, which every man should possess whose privilege it is to live under such a government as ours.

"The questions are propounded and the opinion solicited for myself alone, for my own satisfaction before I act in the premises, subject to any suggestion you may be pleased to communicate. Should I have transcended the bounds of propriety in making the appeal, I trust you will pardon the humble individual whose observation of passing events has led him to esteem you as a public benefactor, and ascribe it to the profound respect of

"Your obedient and very humble servant,

"ALFRED VAIL."

To this Henry Clay replied in an autograph letter, in which he expresses himself in favor of the government owning the telegraph, but insinuates

the difficulty of getting Congress to make any appropriation for it. I copy Mr. Clay's letter. It reads:

“ASHLAND, 10 Sept., 1844.

“DEAR SIR :

“Absence from home and the pressure of a most burdensome correspondence have delayed the acknowledgment of the receipt of your favor of the 15th ultimo. I should be most happy to give you a satisfactory response to your inquiries respecting the electro-magnetic telegraph, but I fear I can say nothing that will in the least benefit you. Assuming the success of your experiments, it is quite manifest that it is destined to exert great influence on the business affairs of society. In the hands of private individuals they will be able to monopolize intelligence and to perform the greatest operations in commerce and other departments of business. I think such an engine ought to be exclusively under the control of the government, but that object cannot be accomplished without an appropriation of Congress to purchase the right of the invention. With respect to the practicability of procuring such an appropriation from a body governed by such various views, both of constitutional power and expediency, you are quite as competent to judge as I am. As the session of that body is now nigh at hand, I submit to you whether it would not be advisable to offer your right to it before you dispose of it to a private company or to individuals. If I understand the progress of your experiment, it has been attended with further and satisfactory demonstrations since the adjournment of Congress. I am,

“Respectfully, your friend and obedient servant,

“To ALFRED VAIL, Esq.

“H. CLAY.”

These letters are only a few of a large number of all kinds and from many eminent people. The whole correspondence is full of strange and interesting matter. It shows in a beautiful light the character of Alfred Vail, and demonstrates, in the words of Amos Kendall, who knew both inventors intimately, that when justice is done the name of Alfred Vail will stand associated with that of Samuel F. B. Morse in the history and introduction into public use of the electro-magnetic telegraph.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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#### VALUES AND WAGES IN MEXICO.

THE *Norte*, a newspaper of the city of Chihuahua, referring to my article on “Wages in Mexico,” which appeared in THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW for January, in which I stated that the wages of field laborers range in Chihuahua from 18½ cents to 25 cents maximum, says that they are not so low, and that, on the contrary, that state is perhaps one of those in Mexico where field hands and workmen in general are better paid. The wages of field laborers there, the *Norte* says, vary from 37½ cents minimum to \$2, the latter being the sum paid to cowboys who furnish their mounts.

Since the construction of the railroads, it is said, wages in general, and especially those paid to the poorest classes of laborers, have had a remarkable advance, which has been maintained, with a tendency to a further rise rather than a fall. For instance, bricklayers get at least \$1.25 per day, while a foreman bricklayer gets \$3 per day. It is difficult to get a servant for less than \$10 a month, besides board, and other laborers are paid on the same scale. The data I published were furnished to me by the officials of the Mex-